

Club Beyond takes on challenge

By SrA. Sarah Franco
Public affairs

Seventy-five students and adults from the RAF Lakenheath, RAF Mildenhall, RAF Feltwell, RAF Menwith Hill and RAF Alconbury took on a challenge in Arad, Romania, over spring break.

They're part of Club Beyond, an ecumenical Christian youth group, which takes on a project each year to give military youth the opportunity to learn and work with different cultures.

This year's project to Romania involved 416 students and adults from Clubs Beyond from all over Europe. They represented groups from the Air Force, Navy and Army. Part of the trip is dedicated to completing a service project. For that, the participants built two fortress-style playgrounds, painted and cleaned walls and more.

"We helped (the needy) by fixing up buildings and playgrounds, but we also helped them by giving love and hugs," said Tido Huckfeldt, Lakenheath's Club Beyond director. "A hug can go a long way."

Participants divided into teams named after body parts, to emphasize the need for everyone to work together in harmony. Each day, they were sent on a different task, whether it be working on a building or with people.

"The kids didn't always pound nails," Huckfeldt said. "Sometimes, they helped children make beaded bracelets or cotton-ball bunnies."

The theme of the trip was the "Overall Body Workout."

"In Christianity, we are taught to try to work together as the body does," Huckfeldt said. "We are taught that each of us has different strengths, but without the whole, the strengths mean nothing."

"By keeping this in mind, the kids learned



Photos by A1C Mike Owens

Ashley Middleton plays games with a Romanian student.

why it's important to be a part of the body. They also learned that they have to have a positive attitude, a willing heart and a flexible spirit."

Another task that was taken on by all was vacation Bible school. The school was held at a variety of sites, including an elementary school, a school for the blind, a school for the handicapped and in a gypsy community. Vacation Bible school did present a challenge to participants because every word had to go through an interpreter, said Huckfeldt.

In addition to the physical tasks taken on by students, some took on a spiritual tasks. Each evening, students were challenged with questions that were presented by a guest speaker at the nightly club meetings.

"Another part of our mission was to grow spiritually," said Huckfeldt. At the end of each day, the group would come together to discuss the ups and downs of their days.

"Michael O'Leary (Young Life regional director) used illustrations to help us think about Christianity and why it's important," Huckfeldt said. "After these exercises, we would break up into smaller groups and talk about the day's events and the speaker's thoughts. We would analyze why they were important and what they meant to us individually."

Brandon Rochon, an 18-year-old Lakenheath High School junior, said the trip was awesome.

"I can't describe how great it was," he said. "It's hard to explain, 'cause you have to experience it."

Rochon was torn between visiting his parents in Saudi Arabia or participating in the Club Beyond trip.

"God must have wanted me to go," he said. "He closed so many other doors. But I wouldn't have traded the experience for the world."

The kids don't come back the same from projects like the one in Romania, said Huckfeldt. They remember what they saw, smelled and heard for the rest of their lives. The change, however, is positive, he said, because they have more concern for the world around them.

"Going on a trip like this makes you think twice about everything," Rochon said. "It makes you realize the difference between wants and needs. It also made me realize that I am blessed and I should thank God for everything I have."

A trip like this gives people a different perspective on the rest of the world, said Huckfeldt. Their eyes are opened up to a larger world than you find in America and the local bases. That's why going on these trips is important.

"I wanted to show the kids that Jesus Christ and I love them and that people aren't afraid to give them a hug and a smile," Rochon said. "The strongest memory I have was when a Romanian kid told me I was his brother in God. That was very moving."

Service Project '97 was the culmination of many hours of collecting donations on base. Many people in the community made this project possible for the participants.

"Throughout the year, we do fundraising to get the money we need to do these yearly projects," Huckfeldt said. "We are grateful to the community for helping and supporting us. Everyone here is a part of the process."

(Story compiled from local sources and Cheryl Hawkins' news release.)



Brian Winkler plays "Duck, duck, goose" with a Romanian student at vacation Bible school.

Project Romania report

A full report of Project Romania activities is at the chapel at 7 p.m. Tuesday. For more information, call Ext. 5195.